

Football Officiating V to X

VIDEO

Whenever possible, watch tape of the games you work. Most athletic directors and coaches will gladly send a copy of the game if the crew provides a self-addressed, postage-paid video mailer. The crew should chip in and share the expenses since everyone on the crew will benefit.

Internet-based options are also available. That gives you the ability to watch the game you worked as well as get a sneak peek at teams you'll have in the future.

Any time you watch a video, watch it with a critical eye, preferably as a crew. Questions you should be asking include: Are you lining up where you should be? After the ball is snapped, are you moving to be in position to make the necessary calls? Are you looking off the ball or are you being a ball watcher? How are your forward-progress spots?

Check to make sure penalties were properly enforced, the crew correctly signaled the clock to stop and start, flags and beanbags were dropped at the appropriate places and that the fouls you called actually show up on film.

WHISTLE

Your whistle is like your voice. It can convey messages, in a “whisper” or a “holler.” When you blow your whistle, make sure you’re saying what you want to say.

The ready-for-play signal should be a firm, one- or two-second tone. A request for a timeout or some other clock stoppage merits a firmer if not longer blast. When an official has thrown or sees a penalty flag on a play, a series of short toots help inform the referee of the situation.

Now about the whistle itself. If a whistle on a lanyard is used, both must be black. Carry a spare in your pants pocket. If a finger whistle is used, it should also be black plastic. Use a finger whistle only if you’ve trained yourself not to make one-armed signals.

Finger whistles are a boon for several reasons. One is safety. With the whistle out of your mouth, you are less likely to have teeth knocked out or damaged if a player’s stray elbow hits you in the mouth. Another reason is preventing inadvertent whistles. The time it takes you to bring your whistle to your mouth is all the time it may take to realize you shouldn’t be blowing the whistle at all.

XEROPHILOUS

You probably wondered how we were going to solve the “X” problem. Now you’re probably wondering what the heck xerophilous is and how it relates to officiating.

Our friends at Webster’s tell us that xerophilous means “Capable of thriving in a hot, dry climate.” Some plants and animals are so equipped, but most humans are not. To make a long story short, this is a reminder to drink plenty of fluids when you officiate in hot or humid weather.

Dehydration is arguably the most dangerous side effect of officiating in hot conditions for prolonged periods of time. Dehydration can not only dramatically affect performance, but can lead to heat stroke, a potentially life-threatening condition.

When exercise is performed in high humidity, sweat doesn’t evaporate as efficiently to produce cooling. The increase in body temperature causes more ineffective sweating, increases dehydration and hastens the increase in core body temperature. The combination of increased body temperature and rapid dehydration leads to decreased performance.

A drop in physical ability is not the only consequence of even slight dehydration. Several scientific studies have shown dehydration also leads to decreased mental ability.

Sports officials are faced with complex tasks requiring judgment, memory and concentration. Considering the loss of mental ability and physical performance, a dehydrated official will not only be unable to run to the action, he won't know what to do when he gets there.

Avoiding dehydration is difficult because athletes and officials will typically take a drink only when thirsty. Quenching your thirst does not sufficiently replenish fluid levels. Avoiding dehydration requires drinking more fluid than needed to satisfy thirst.

A number of sports drinks are available and all contain reasonable amounts of both carbohydrates (sugars) and electrolytes (salts). Avoid soda-type drinks since most contain too much sugar and not enough salts. Sodas also contain caffeine, which increases urine production and counteracts your body's effort to conserve water.

Ideally, you should consume four to six ounces of fluid for every 10 to 15 minutes of activity to effectively avoid dehydration. That avoids filling the stomach with large quantities of fluid at one time. Most officials cannot stop

activity every few minutes to take a drink. A more practical technique is to drink three to four cups (24 to 32 ounces) of fluid about once an hour. Use that method in your preseason workouts in order to get your body accustomed to performing activities with fluid in your stomach.

According to Dr. Emilio Vazquez, M.D., who practices family medicine and officiates in Madisonville, Ky., drinking about two or three cups of fluid 10 to 15 minutes before a game is also recommended. Over-hydration will not only decrease the chance of dehydration, but will also help your stomach start emptying and force your body to absorb the fluid. If it's a very hot or humid day, increase fluid intake to as much as one to two quarts an hour.

Replenishing lost fluids after a contest is important when an official has an assignment the following day. Even under ideal circumstances, it's difficult to end a long day sufficiently hydrated. If you start the next day a little "dried out," you'll have a hard time catching up with your body's needs.

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